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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

AUGUST 1st, 1860.

A SHORT GUIDE TO FULL-SCORE PLAYING.*

WHEN an invented piece of music is to be performed by an entire orchestra, each instrument must be given its individual share. As all bear a proper harmonic proportion to each other, and should sound to the hearer as though forming a sole instrument, the composer should lay out a plan of his work for general view; this is called a full score. It should be written bar for bar, all the parts above one another; by this means, it is possible at one glance to judge of a combination, as well as of harmonies, positions of chords, separate passages, &c., individually or in mutual relations. Ancient composers had the laudable habit of figuring the bass of their scores; this, like many other useful customs, has disappeared; and, to speak candidly, we fear that many a natural composer would occasionally find it hard to give strict reckoning of his intellectual products—to mark the fundamental part with regular figures—and, by them, openly declare, “this is what I wish!”—“thus have I intended!” To play from a score thus figured, merely requires a good knowledge of thorough-bass; and the accompaniment will be similar to, though poorer, than that of many instruments. To supply the place of these, a player from score should endeavour to give a faithful sketch of all peculiarities in each part, and to seize the meaning of the composer, in harmony, progressions of subject, treatment of divers instruments, and general elaboration. This is real full-score playing—a masterly art, which Rosseau admired as a miracle, and which must appear such to the uninitiated, who can scarcely comprehend how an entire page may be read at one glance, while both hands render it intelligible to an audience. It cannot be denied that the task is difficult, and can only be achieved by long practice; universal rules cannot be given, but well-intentioned hints and experienced results may be written down for the benefit of beginners. The first requisite for a full-score player is an intimacy with all five cleffs; next to this, he must never be confused by the instrumental parts which are written in a key different to their sound—such as, for instance, horns in D, E♭, E, F, G, A, B♭, which, like trumpets and drums, are written in C—clarinets in A or B—basset and English horns, &c.; he must always be prepared to transpose them readily to their proper position. Before playing a full-score, it is advisable to examine the order in which

the instruments are placed: it is much to be desired that some law should be agreed upon on this subject, which would greatly facilitate performance; unfortunately, this is not the case, and each composer acts as he chooses; for instance, Italians usually write, in the first place, both violins—then the wind-instruments, the viola, trumpets, drums, voices, and the bass; others write the brass-band at the top; some insert the voices in the middle—and so forth. Perhaps the easiest and most natural order would be this:—the top line be given to the flutes, as these instruments generally contain high three-stroke and four-stroke notes, and therefore require the greatest blank paper; then may follow, hautboys, clarinets, horns, bassoons, trombones, trumpets, and drums, by which arrangement the upper half of a page unites the entire wind band; the remaining staves may be given to the violins, violas (if a vocal composition, all the voices), the violoncellos, and double-bass. As the stringed instruments are often employed alone, it cannot be denied that it is an advantage to place them in close juxtaposition; and, if the first-mentioned order be followed, it will be necessary to search for the two essentially principal parts—bass and treble—at the farthest opposite poles. In vocal compositions, a player from full-score must be guided, in great measure, by the presence or absence of singers: should the vocal parts be appropriately sung, he need only occupy himself with the accompanying instruments; when this is not the case, his first duty is to render perceptible voice-parts containing a melody, and, if there should be tenor or bass, he must play them an octave higher with the right hand, in order that the flow of the song may be perfectly distinguished. The same should be done, when any instrument has to perform a solo-passage; the part must be individualized, and the accompanying complement be subordinate. It is permitted to every player, to accommodate compositions to his hand; that is, to arrange passages which are not adapted to pianoforte playing, so that they should be convenient to the fingers—care being taken not to injure peculiar characteristics. For instance, when a clarinet or horn contains an arioso, while violins accompany in arpeggio semiquavers, the right hand should perform the cantabile, and the left the accompaniment, properly modified; the little finger of the left hand should always strike the fundamental tones of the bass, that the position of the chords may remain unchanged, and that the rolling underpart should not create, by chance, a chord of the fourth and sixth, instead of a perfect triad. It often happens that several obligato passages in different instruments occur simultaneously, in which case it is impossible for two hands to represent them all. Good judgment must at once decide what is most important, and what is best omitted; the lesser of two evils must be chosen, and a player should retain, in preference, those parts which would make most lasting

* From Albrechtsberger's Collected Writings on Thorough-Bass, Harmony, and Composition, for Self Instruction. Published in Novello's Library for the Diffusion of Musical Knowledge. Theoretical Series, No. 6.

impression on the ear if the piece were performed by a full orchestra, of which he is the representation—his faithful sketch must clearly render delicate shades and touches, as well as general outline. The fuller the harmonies, and the more perceptible individual peculiarities are made, the greater the praise due to the full-score player. We need hardly remind a discreet accompanist, that vocal pieces are best treated with delicate and intentional moderation. In recitatives, it may be advisable to give the commencing note of the voice part in the concluding chord of the accompaniment, as this will facilitate intonation for the singer. It must be clear to all, that a full-score is absolutely necessary; by it, a composer is able to review his creation—he perceives beforehand the effect of the whole, and judges the mutual connections of the principal and subordinate parts—he can examine the correctness of his work, and improve any accidental defect, and thus give up his production of art in completed perfection. A full-score offers great advantages to the initiated; by the mere reading or playing of it, on a piano-forte, he becomes as intimate with a composition as though he had himself created it. His eager eye may discover the design, construction, elaboration, and interweaving of all ideas—the united result of many component parts; nothing need escape him. If he can, in addition, imagine the charm of different instrumental tones, he enjoys as high a pleasure as those who listen to a performance of the same work by a union of musicians. But, precisely, this proper judgment of the manifold effect of divers instruments is a stumbling-block to many composers, who cannot possibly be expected to play on all instruments, or to be familiar with their individual treatment, or even to be sufficiently furnished with the knowledge indispensable to their appropriate employment with fullest effect and peculiar beauty. When we consider how deficient orchestras were some few years ago, especially in the wind-parts, which were still in their infancy—how, in modern times, not only the instruments themselves have been essentially perfected, but the performers thereon have so improved, that passages formerly reserved for concertos, are now entrusted to ripieno-players (whether rightly or not, remains unproved); when we recollect the laughable, but well-meant warning of a certain chapel-director, who, with the important mien of a field-marshal, called out to his band, “Attention, gentlemen! semiquaver-notes are coming!” and contrast this with a performance of one of Beethoven’s gigantic symphonies; and when we lose ourselves in admiration of the unimagined effects created by this hero of musical art, who majestically trod the path prepared by Haydn and Mozart, and followed by Cherubini, Mehul, Spohr, Carl Maria von Weber: when we reflect on all these things,—who would not exclaim, with heart-felt conviction, “*Vita brevis, ars longa!*” In the same manner that newly-discovered celestial bodies ever present

themselves to the armed eye of astronomers, so also does never-resting Time, at measured intervals, create beaming planets in the musical horizon; for art is eternal, and only the royal eagle may gaze unharmed on the sun. It is certain that one of the most dangerous rocks to an inexperienced composer, is the advantageous employment of united masses of instruments, which sometimes produce an effect quite unexpected, and not realizing his original intention. Every one must pay, so to speak, an apprentice fee—*errand discimus*. Individual experience will instruct scholars by degrees, and lead them into the right path. The study of really classic scores—the repeated hearing of such works—a careful comparison of effect, and the ways and means of producing it—friendly consultations with practical musicians, as to the capabilities and treatment of their appropriate instruments—constant essays, which, however, must be considered such, and not perfected masterpieces,—all these things will render steady service to a disciple of the art—will enlarge, correct, and enrich his views—and lead him, after happily-concluded and usefully-improved apprentice years, to a resting-place, from whence he may view his musical creations with an assured glance, and may safely prognosticate and guarantee the effects created in them.

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Brief Chronicle of the last Month.

BETHNAL GREEN.—On the 12th ult., a testimonial was presented to the Rev. W. Kerry, the incumbent of St. Thomas’s, consisting of a silver tea service of a chaste design. There was also a handsomely-framed vote of thanks, written on vellum, and an address detailing several of the institutions of the new parish, and the Rev. Mr. Kerry’s services in connexion therewith. An organ, lent for the occasion by Mr. Churchwarden Green, and which was presided at by Mr. Butler, the organist of the church, contributed greatly to the pleasure of the evening; the choir also rendering very effective service on the occasion. This testimonial, making the *fifth*, was presented by the vestry-clerk of the parish (Mr. J. W. Brooks), whose remarks elicited an appropriate response from the Incumbent, who expressed with much feeling his sense of the kindness shewn him.

CASTLETON.—On Saturday, July 14th, the members of St. Matthew’s Church Voluntary Choir visited Castleton